1: Warner E-5 (1926-1929) 1937
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852 [The activities of the foregoing sections, largely preparatory, have involved only the home camp. The arrival of the visiting clans marks the beginning of the most significant phases of the Gunabibi.]

852 202 ●211 1. The men then leave and go back to their ceremonial camp. The two Yiritja snakes are given a human hair string decorated with parrot feathers and tipped with white cockatoo feathers. It is a ceremonial "message stick" and represents the snake. The men leave with the message and go to the other clans, inviting them to the ceremony.

[535] 2. Meanwhile the song and dance cycle of Section C 3 is gone through, starting with the unmated male sea gull and ending with the four Muits. At the same time a large round hole is dug in the men's ceremonial grounds by the members of the Yiritja moiety. All the animals, birds and plants which dance get in the well with the two Yiritja snakes. In theory the two snakes leave with a message stick; but in practice this seldom happens, unless they go to nearby clans. They wait until the end of the ceremony, centered around the taboo hole, before departing; or if they do leave, two other men enact the rôles of the Yiritja snakes. The leader sings over them, and they all dance in the well as one people.

852 A month has supposedly gone by since the departure of the messengers, and the moon is once more new. Once again the men put bushes under their arms, carry lighted torches, leave their own ceremonial ground, and dance out near the women's ground, where [431] they surround the group of women. The old women repeat their previous performance. Gifts are again made by the women.

All the men, including the two Yiritja snakes carrying the presents made by the women, return to the men's camp again. A forked stick railing is placed around the taboo well and the gifts are hung on it. The Dua leaders of the Gunabibi ceremony keep the gifts after this offering has been made to Muit.

852 202 3. The two Yiritja snakes and the initiated son or younger brother of the leader of the Gunabibi (in other words, two Yiritja moiety men and one Dua moiety man) are given a mandelprindi and told to go to all the clans and tell them they are ready for the final phases of the ceremony. The Yiritja snakes are sometimes spoken of as the waku of Yurlunggur, and the son of the leader is "all the same as the snake. He can't sing out, but the Yiritja snakes do it for him." The Yiritja men whirl the bull roarer outside the camps of the various clans as a signal that the final dance will start and also as an invitation and virtual command for all who hear to appear.

At the various camps messengers supposedly go through some of

1: Warner E-5 (1926-1929)1937
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884 5. Snail shell rattles are manufactured.

6. A bark house is constructed and is painted with ceremonial designs.

1. While the group of headdress dances of Section F dances is being performed, two emblems are under construction. They are large representations of the Dua kangaroo and Yiritja kangaroo tails. The smaller [211] emblems previously mentioned function as message sticks for the kangaroos who announce the ceremony to the other tribes; these larger ones are used as emblems in the ceremony. They are brought out by the dancers who jump over each other. Yiritja jump over the Dua and Dua over the Yiritja in the same manner as our children play leap frog.

2. If the ceremony is to last two years the snake dance ground is not excavated, since it forms a part of what is considered the final portion of the Ulmark. If it is decided to complete the ceremony in one season, the Yiritja and Dua kangaroo messengers dig the dance place to a depth of a man's shoulder. It is in the center of the dance ground and well protected by heavy clumps of jungle growth. It has the same triangular shape as the snake ground in Section D and the one found in the Djungguan ceremony (which is not dug but is on the surface of the ground); but in addition it has a pathway dug to one side of the triangle. It is the python snake's body. It is supposed to face the southeast both in this ceremony and in the Djungguan. Bushes are piled in it at the head of the ground.

3. The women's dance ground is only a cleared space in the center of the general camp.

4. While the men are digging the triangular snake ground, the women, of both home and visiting clans, clear a small path which encircles the whole of the men's ceremonial grounds. (It winds and twists like the track left by a huge python.)

5. After the excavating has ceased, the men gather dry snail shells. [237 534] These are painted with red ocher on which is dotted white clay. A half dozen of these shells are strung on one string and tied to a spear-thrower. Several of these snail-shell rattles are made.

6. A bark house is also built on the ceremonial grounds. The house [342 531] is the same in structure as those used in the rainy season. The interior walls are painted with realistic and geometric figures (which illustrate the story of the two Wawilak sisters).

884 713 *Native Interpretation.*—The triangular and the women's dance ground are identical with the Djungguan dance places and are looked

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THE ART OF YIRRKALLA

Two bark paintings, a ceremonial message stick[19] and a staff,[20] used in the *karawak* totemic rituals, were made by the Yirrkalla aborigines.

The central design on Pl. 115E is the totemic hollow tree at Djerakoi, Cape Shield, with *karawak*, the night-bird, sitting on top of it. The black semicircles at *a*, *a*, and *b*, *b*, and similar designs on the trunk, are openings in the hollow tree, the home of the opossum, *marungo*. At dusk the opossum leaves the opening, *a*, climbs the tree and, entering *b*, keeps *karawak* company during the hours of darkness. At the first sign of dawn the opossum leaves *karawak* and, descending the trunk, enters the hole *a* and goes to sleep. On the right is the opossum ascending, and on the left, descending. The short white marks on the trunk of the tree are the scratches made by the claws of the opossum as he climbs up and down. The meandering lines on panels *c*, *c*, *c*, *c*, *c*, *c*, indicate marks in the mud at the base of the totemic tree made by the opossum, *marungo*, the ghost crabs, *gunjun*, and an unidentified lizard, *gainnerena*. In some undetermined way these three creatures are associated in the myths.

On Pl. 115B the tall vertical figure in the middle of the painting is the hollow totemic tree at Djerakoi on which *karawak* seated himself to talk to the opossum. Flying round *karawak* are five cicadas. A number of opossums are shown ascending the tree after dark and descending when dawn breaks. The short white lines indicate the scratches made on the tree by their claws. The upper six panels of wavy lines, *a*, *a*, *a*, *a*, *a*, *a*, represent the footmarks of the opossums as they walked round the totemic tree. The circles at the corners of the square, *b*, are the holes of the crabs, *gunjun*, which followed the opossum to the tree, and the lines joining the circles are the tracks made in the sand by the crabs as they walked from one hole to another.[21] In the squares, *c*, on the lower left are four dingoes. The surrounding designs are the paths of the dingoes, and the dots are their tracks.

The Dugongs, Merinjunga

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Two bark paintings deal with the fragment of a myth about some mythical dugongs (*Dugong australis*) which once lived at Bartu, near Cape Wilberforce. One of the dugongs was killed by a mythical man, *Oramula*.

In Pl. 116C the large dugong, *merinjunga*, is dead. The broken lines on his head are the maggots crawling from his body, and the cross-hatched bands, the strips of meat, as they are cut from the animals by the aborigines. There was no explanation of the cross-hatched background. Interpretation made by F. D. McCarthy.

Plate 116A shows a male and a female dugong, *merinjunga*, at Gongora, near Cape Wilberforce. The cross-hatched panels leading from their heads represent submarine grass, the food of the dugongs. The vertical panels, *a*, symbolize the ripples on the water and the bubbles coming to the surface as the creatures feed on the sea bottom.

19. Fig. 65A, B. 20. Pl. 134E.
21. Myth, p. 298, and design of the crabs, *gunjun*, on bark painting, Pl. 115F.

3: Mountford E-5 (1948) 1956 OII7 Murngin OII7

Plate 149E shows the painted *murnian* of the water-lily totem. The lines of dots represent the blossoms; the parallel lines, the stalks—or their pithy centre—which the aborigines eat.

The Man, Marowwil

Plate 149F illustrates a *murnian* associated with a mythical man, *Marowwil*, whose totemic place, Anawouja, is near the Liverpool River.

The longitudinal lines represent the stomach of *Marowwil*; the dots, his faeces; and the cross-hatching, his fat.

9. MESSAGE STICKS

The scattered records of message sticks in the anthropological literature of the last seventy-five years indicate that, in one form or another, they have been, or still are being, used over most of aboriginal Australia. Spencer and Gillen,[43] however, found no evidence that sticks of the type recorded elsewhere were used by the Aranda tribe of Central Australia. Nor did I find any evidence of the use of message sticks among the aborigines of the western deserts of Central Australia, whose tribal lands are immediately west of the Aranda. Message sticks, however, are used by the aborigines of the Nullarbor Plain, which is on the southern fringe of the western deserts of Central Australia.[44] Roth,[45] in 1897, recorded fourteen message sticks from northern Queensland, and Howitt,[46] in 1901, twenty-one examples from south-eastern Australia. Both authors explained the meanings and the manner in which the sticks were used. Up to date, Roth and Howitt have made the major contributions to our knowledge of message sticks, although many other writers have referred to them.

According to both Howitt and Roth, message sticks were used for several purposes, namely, to call the participants of a ceremony together, to invite fellow-tribesmen to a hunt or a fight, and to convey a personal request from one aboriginal, through a messenger, to another, asking him for food or goods. Both Roth and Howitt, and in fact most of the other writers on the subject, are definite that the message sticks serve only as a memory aid, or perhaps a passport, the designs themselves having no recognizable meaning, nor could they be read without the aid of someone who had been told their meaning by the sender of the stick. On a number of the message sticks figured from Queensland by Roth, and from south-eastern Australia by Howitt, many of the designs referred to topographical features which the messenger would have to pass before he reached his destination. Sometimes there were notches, the length of the journey in days. Topographical details also were present on the message sticks I recorded from the southern edge of the Nullarbor Plain.[47]

There were, however, no such topographical details engraved on any of the examples collected at either Yirrkalla or Oenpelli. With the exception of the

43. Spencer and Gillen (1899), p. 112.
44. Mountford (1939), p. 122.
45. Roth (1897), p. 137, Fig. 325-30.
46. Howitt (1904), pp. 691-70, Figs. 42-5.
47. Mountford (1938), p. 122.

ceremonial message sticks, they were all personal requests for food, tobacco and other goods used by the white man. I feel sure, however, that fuller research would reveal many more examples of the ceremonial type. 211

Whilst at Yirrkalla and Oenpelli I had to fly to Darwin several times on expedition matters. Each time I went one or more aborigines gave me message sticks to deliver to their friends at Darwin. My procedure (after I had made a record of the message stick either by a sketch or a rubbing) was to write the meanings of the various symbols on a sheet of paper, wrap the paper round the message stick and enclose it in an envelope, on the outside of which I wrote the name of the recipient as a guide to my memory. When I delivered the message stick, which I did on all but two occasions, I was able to explain to the recipient the significance of the marks on the message stick by referring to my notes. 211 202 177

(1) YIRRKALLA

While the expedition party was at Yirrkalla we received a visit from a white man who, according to the aborigines, had bought their seed pearls and tortoise-shell, but had not paid for them. A number of aborigines carved message sticks, which they delivered to the visitor by hand to remind him of his debt. At the same time, the aborigines added a request for a number of items of clothing and luxuries in the forlorn hope that some day he might send them along. Before the message sticks were delivered, I was able to make rubbings of two, one from *Bununga*, Fig. 66C, and another from *Mungarrai*, Fig. 67C, E. 211 202 439

(a) SECULAR MESSAGE STICKS

On Fig. 66C, which is *Bununga's* message stick, the upper three lines, *a*, represent three boxes of matches, *b*, two blankets, and *c*, singlets. Triangle *e* refers to the nineteen shillings debt owing to *Bununga* for some time; *d* is a request for shirts, *m* for two fishing lines, *n* for calico, and *o* for tobacco. 211 532*

Fig. 67E is *Mungarrai's* message stick to the same white man. The central dot, *a*, is the white man, the recipient of the message stick. The triangle *b* is a request for a towel, *c*, *c*, *c* for loin cloths, *d* a new belt, *e* a knife, *f* a mirror, *g* razor blades, *h* two fishing lines, *j* trousers, *k* shirt, *l* hair comb, and *m* hair oil.

On the reverse side, Fig. 67C, the upper cross-hatched carving is pure decoration. The line *n* is the sender, *Mungarrai*. The triangles, *o*, refer to the money owing to him for seed pearls and tortoise-shell; *p* is a request for a bag of flour, *q* for sugar, *r* for sticks of tobacco. *Mungarrai* referred to *s* as the 'asking' line.[48]

Figure 66E, F illustrates a message stick sent by *Wondjuk* at Yirrkalla to his partner, *Baramala*, in the ceremonial exchange cycle of Arnhem Land.[49]

48. This 'asking' symbol is also engraved on Fig. 67C, *s*, *t*, *u*, *w*, *x*, *z*.

49. Donald Thomson (1949) has given us a full description of the economic structure and ceremonial exchange system of Arnhem Land. The stone-headed spears, *namba*, asked for by *Wondjuk* travel only in a southerly direction, while the articles from Yirrkalla, i.e. stone axes, ceremonial logs and feather ornaments, move in the opposite direction. The types of articles and their direction of travel are indicated in Fig. 2 of Thomson's book. [439]

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Rosemary Dunnett

FIG. 65. Ceremonial message sticks and bark figures, Yirrkalla
A, B The night-bird, kunwuk, and the opossum, murunga C, D Bunbulama and Wolaiwuk
E, F The sun, Banu-banu

3: Mountford E-5 (1948) 1956 Ol17 Muragin Ol17

24 532* 439

W'ondjuk is asking his trade partner, *Barumala* (who lives near the famous flint quarries of Nilipidji, west of Blue Mud Bay) to send him a number of articles, including several bundles of stone-headed spears. This bundle of spears will be repaid, in turn, by articles which *W'ondjuk* will collect in the Yirrkalla area.

The elongated designs, *a*, on the bottom of the obverse and the reverse side of Fig. 66E, F is a request to *Barumala* to send two bundles of stone-headed spears to *W'ondjuk*; *c* refers to a ceremonial string, *purukuku*, of the *dua* moiety, in which white eagle down is twisted during manufacture, and *d*, a carrying-basket for *W'ondjuk's* wife. The short parallel lines on either side are decoration only.

Figure 66D is a message stick which *Mauwulun*, one of my informants, asked a member of the expedition to deliver to a white man who had visited Yirrkalla previously. The message stick was a reminder to the recipient about a number of articles he had promised to send to *Mauwulun* and his wife.

The upper part of the message stick dealt largely with the requirements of *Mauwulun's* wife. The lines *a* are a request for two skirts, *b* two singlets, *c* a hair comb, *d* a mirror, and *e* a bottle of hair oil; *f* is *Mauwulun's* request for a turtle rope, and *p* for many fish-hooks.

On the lower panel, *Mauwulun* is asking at *g* for much tobacco, at *h* for a mirror, *o* a hair comb, *r* a knife, *j* a pair of trousers, *m* two short trousers, and *n* a belt. The four crescent shapes indicate the many moons since the articles were promised.

Figure 66G, H is a message stick I carried from *W'ondjuk* at Yirrkalla to *Barumia* in Darwin.

One side of the message stick, Fig. 66H, dealt with goods required by *W'ondjuk*; the other, Fig. 66G, those required by his wife. On Fig. 66H, *a* is a request for a mirror, *b* for hair oil, *c* long trousers, *d* a shirt, the multiple lines, *e*, on the left, many sticks of tobacco, and *f*, a number of blankets.

On Fig. 66G, *m* is a request for a skirt for *W'ondjuk's* wife, *n* for calico, and *o* for a belt.

Fig. 67D, G illustrates a message stick *Matarman*, at Yirrkalla, asked me to deliver to his brother, *Malarupan*, in Darwin.

On Fig. 67D is the figure of *Malarupan*, the recipient. The meanings of the various lines are: *a*, two white shirts; *b*, two khaki shirts; *c*, one blue coat; *d*, two belts; *e*, two knives; *f*, two khaki shorts; *g*, two long white trousers; and *h*, a hat. The border of short lines is decoration.

The symbols on Fig. 67G (on which the figure of *Matarman*, the sender, is engraved) indicate the goods required by *Matarman's* wife: *j*, two bottles of hair oil; *k*, two combs; *l*, a looking-glass; *m*, two small belts; *n*, two dresses; *o*, a singlet; *p*, two belts, white; *q*, two more small belts; *r*, a pair of scissors. The zig-zag lines, *s*, *t*, *u*, *w*, *x*, *z*, are 'asking' marks.

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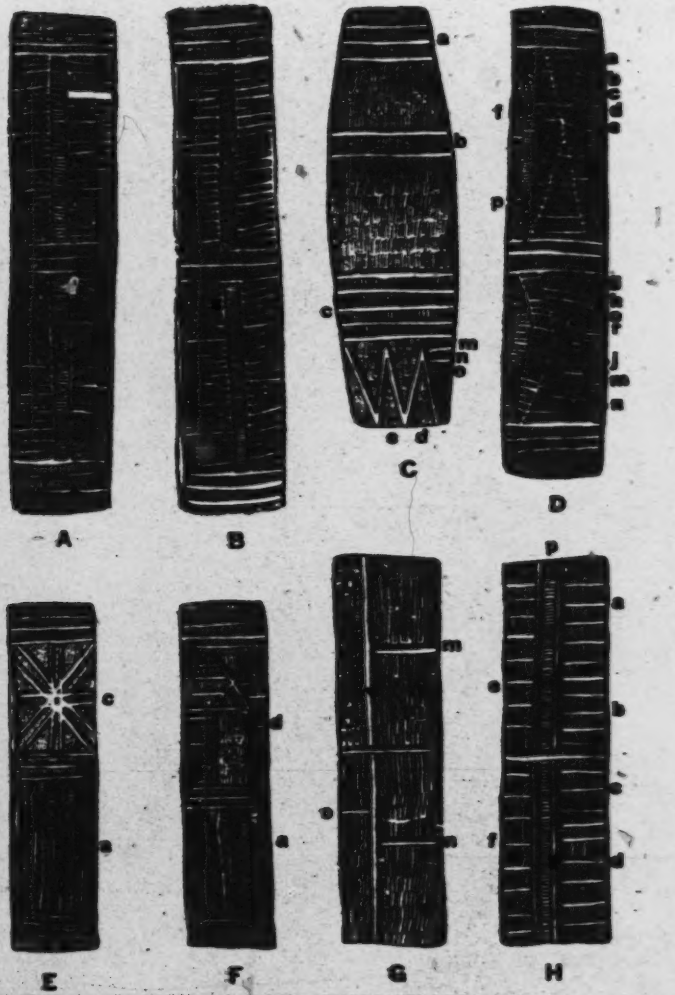
Jean Tyssen

FIG. 66. Secular message sticks, Yirrkalla
A, B Unidentified C Buranga D Mauwalan E, F, G, H Wandjuk

CARVED AND PAINTED FIGURES

Three of the message sticks from Yirrkalla were unidentified, Fig. 68C, D, Fig. 66A, B, and Fig. 67A, F. They are included to indicate additional designs employed on the message sticks of that locality.

(b) CEREMONIAL MESSAGE STICKS

The Man, Buma-buma, of Trial Bay

At Wialpa, Trial Bay,[50] during mythical times, an old *dua* man, *Boukabaluwuru*, instructed his son, *Buma-buma*, to go to an adjacent group of aborigines and bring back with him two boys who were due to be circumcised. When *Buma-buma* reached the distant camp he demanded, in the name of his father, two girls instead of two boys. Though the old men agreed to the demand, they were somewhat suspicious of the unusual request. On nearing Wialpa, *Buma-buma*, hiding the girls in the jungle, told his father that the old men of the distant people wanted at least another year before their youths were ready for circumcision. The father, who did not believe that story, demanded more and further more details, until *Buma-buma* was forced to admit he had brought girls instead of boys. The men, and especially the father, were so enraged over *Buma-buma's* disobedience and its consequent disgrace that they speared the young man to death. After the burial rituals of *Buma-buma*, the men at Wialpa were so ashamed of his actions that they changed themselves into water-birds, which still live in the nearby fresh-water swamps.

At the present time the ceremonial message stick, on which the figure of *Buma-buma* is engraved, is sent to a group of aborigines who have a boy ready for circumcision.[51] Although the designs on the stick refer specifically to the death and burial of *Buma-buma*, and not to circumcision, the myth of *Buma-buma's* disobedience and punishment is so well known that the significance of the message stick is understood.

Figure 65E is the obverse side and Fig. 65F the reverse. On Fig. 65E the dead body of *Buma-buma*, wrapped for burial, occupies the central position. The spears, which had been thrust into his side, are at *a*, *b*, *c*, *d*. The group of lines, *e*, are *dua* men and *f*, *jiritja* men, who are taking part in the burial rituals. The short lines, *g*, at the top of the message stick are the *jiritja* and *h*, at the bottom, the *dua* men, who are chanting the songs of burial. All these men have since been changed into water-birds. The designs on panel *j* refer to the paper-bark wrapping of the corpse.

The reverse side, Fig. 65F, shows *Buma-buma* when the decomposition is complete and the people have assembled to transfer his bones to the temporary bark coffin. The main lozenge-shaped design is the paper-bark wrapping round the corpse, which is now a skeleton. On the left at *a* is a *dua* man, *Biribirit*, with a bark coffin at his feet, and at *b* a *jiritja* man, also standing on a bark

50. Map, Fig. 57.

51. In north-eastern Arnhem Land the boys are circumcised when they are about eight years of age.

[Text continues on p. 473]

3: Mountford E-5 (1948) 1956 OH17 Murngin OH17

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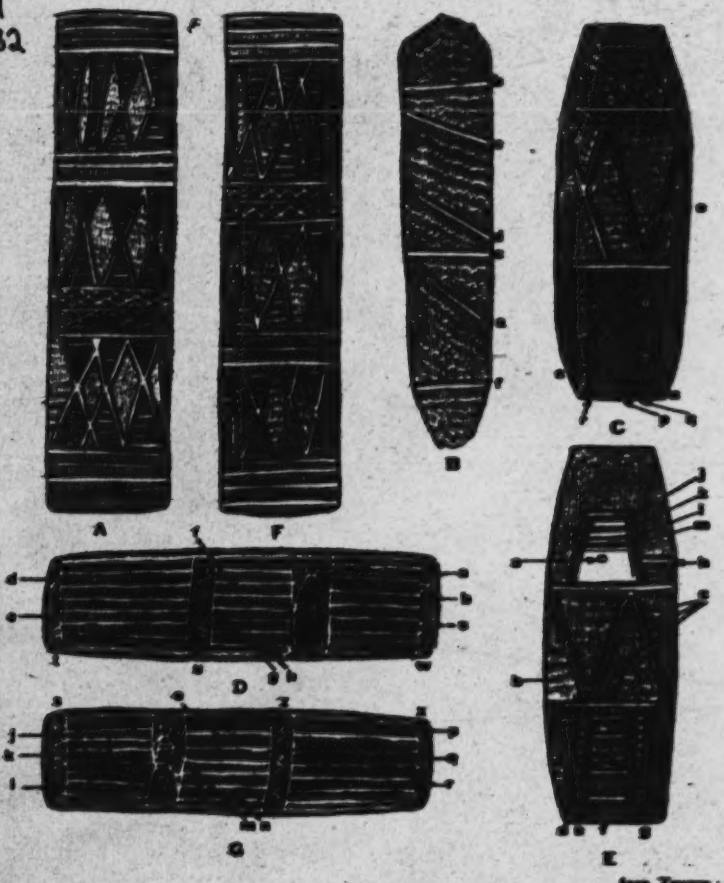

Fig. 67. Secular message sticks, Yirrkalla
A, F Unidentified B Miljirim C, E Mungurul D, G Mainoura

coffin. The short lines around the skeleton are the maggots deserting the body and burying themselves in the ground to pupate. The two men are now water-birds; the coffins, the paper-bark wrappings of the corpse and the body of *Buma-buma* are natural features at Wialpa.

The Night-bird, Karawak, and the Opossum, Marungo

During creation times the night-bird, *karawak*, flew from Milingimbi to a hollow tree at Cape Shield, Blue Mud Bay, so that he could talk to the opossum, *marungo*, who lived in it.[52]

At specified times, the aborigines associated with the night-bird and opossum totems carve a stick, similar to that illustrated on Fig. 65A, B, and send it to the clan and language groups on whose territory *karawak* rested on his way to Cape Shield. The presentation of this stick is an invitation to attend the ceremonies at a specified time and place.[53]

Figure 65A,-B represents the hollow tree at Cape Shield on the top of which, every night, the night-bird and the opossum talk to each other. The day-time camp of the opossum is represented at *e*, *e*, and the night camp at *f*, *f*.

On Fig. 65A, the opossum on the left is ascending the tree at nightfall to keep his companion company, and on the right he is descending to sleep through the hours of daylight. The designs at *a*, *b*, *c* and *d* symbolize water-lilies which grow in the swamps near the totemic tree, and the short lines at the bottom of Fig. 65B, the scratches made by the opossum in the bark of the totemic tree as he climbs up and down.[54]

(2) Oenpelli

Figure 67B is a message stick an aboriginal, *Miljirina*, at Oenpelli asked me to deliver to his friend, *Jakinuramilja*, in Darwin.

The line *a* is *Miljirina*, the sender of the stick, and the line *b* the recipient, *Jakinuramilja*; *c* is *Tundara*, one of *Miljirina's* wives, and *d*, another wife, called *Marinja*. The lines *e* and *f* each represent a bottle of tobacco. *Miljirina* wanted his friend, *Jakinuramilja*, to induce his two wives, *Tundara* and *Marinja*, to come back to him at Oenpelli; he also wanted two bottles of tobacco.[55]

Figure 68E is the message stick I carried from an aboriginal, *Kainarani*, at Oenpelli to his son, *Pultadi*, in Darwin. The sender was distressed because his son had been drinking heavily, and was urging him to return to his father and

52. For the complete myth, see p. 362.

53. Warner (1937), p. 382, mentions that at Milingimbi similar *garrawak* message sticks are carried to both *dua* and *jiritja* groups notifying them that the *narra* rituals are about to start.

54. The symbolism employed on the bark painting of the night-bird and the opossum, Pl. 115E, is similar to that used on the message stick.

55. Tobacco was traded in small bottles. When we were at Yirrkalla the mission authorities at southern Groote Eylandt discontinued the issue of tobacco. After that prohibition, there was a regular trade in bottles of tobacco between the expedition camp and the Groote Eylandt Mission. The tobacco followed the same lines as in the ceremonial trade cycle described by Thomson (1949).

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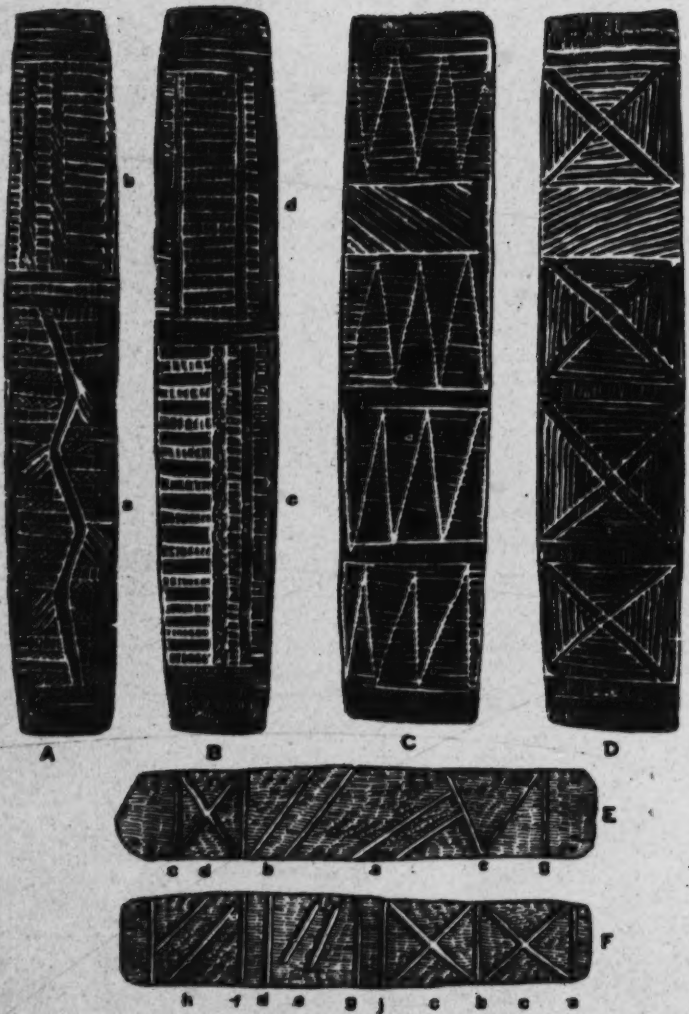

FIG. 68. Message sticks, Yirrkalla and Oenpelli *Jean Travers*

A, B Ceremonial, Djunkgao C, D Unidentified E Kainamui F Mūjirina

9: Thomson E-5 (1935-1943)1949
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carried out locally and under close control, so that the "grass burn" season conducted by each horde, or hunting group, is prolonged sufficiently to yield its full food potential over a period of weeks or months, without waste.

By the time the burning of the grass has been completed, another phase in the cycle is reached. The group may now follow the watercourses, which are gradually drying up, and employ the special fishing methods which tradition (backed by a long period of trial and error) has established, as being appropriate to the area and to the season. They secure fish, freshwater tortoises and snakes, by swimming "drives" and by the use of dams, weirs, traps, nets, and special poisons containing chiefly *rotenone, saponin* and *tephrosin,* which, as the volume of water becomes restricted, can now be used effectively to stupefy the fish. One of the most effective of the fish poisons used by these people is *moiyoŋo* (*Tephrosia leptoclada*)* a leguminous plant with a root shaped like a small parsnip. This plant, of which specimens were examined at Rothamstead Experimental Station (Herts. England) was found to be highly toxic in solutions of 1%. Later again, the groups which have been hunting independently during the early south-east season, will converge on the few deep permanent lagoons, where the camps increase in size as they are augmented by other groups of people who have been similarly engaged in nomadic hunting.

At this time the chief food of the natives inland will be *ŋätu*, the fruit of the Cycad Palm (*Cycas media*), which in this area yields very large quantities of food. In coastal

*A second species of *Tephrosia* hitherto undescribed, also called *moiyoŋo*, collected during the expeditions in Arnhem Land on which this work was carried out, has since been named *T. Arnhemia* by Mr. C. T. White (Government Botanist, Queensland).

15:Chaseling M-5 (ca. 1934-1936)1957
O117 Murngin O117

conclusion that in north-east Arnhem Land, the natives really did know the physiological facts, but were not interested in them; they were only interested in 'spiritual conception', which established a person's place in the social and religious structure of the tribe. But whatever be the degree of knowledge or ignorance regarding the physiological facts, there is no doubt that the accepted spiritual doctrine is one of pre-existence. The unborn spirits sojourn at the totemic well waiting to be incarnated, or reincarnated; to that centre they will return after death; and without the entry of the pre-existent spirit child into the womb, there could be no conception.

Everyday Matters

Mr Chaseling is not concerned with discussing complex social and religious problems. His aim is to help us know the Aboriginal as he is. To this end he provides much information regarding interesting everyday affairs. There is no smoke-signal code in this region, and message sticks are simply aids to memory. The Aborigines like having visitors and are anxious to keep them. Like the rest of us, they are subject to flattery, and they use a highly developed form of praise in asking for favours. The status of the women is low, but some affection is shown between spouses; moreover, women do exercise an important influence on affairs; for they live longer on the average than the man (they are not killed in 'wars'), and as a result accumulate a greater knowledge of the everyday myths and legends and of the clan's enemies and friends. There are about three females to each male, another consequence of 'warfare', and connected with this is the fact that usually a man has three wives; but there are a few cases of men with up to twelve wives.

These and many like facts are recorded in the pages which follow, pages which will do much to help readers appreciate the Aborigines of north-east Arnhem Land as human beings,

15:Chaseling M-5 (ca. 1934-1936)1957
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YULENGOR

●211 [212] Nomads have not acquired the art of recording their thoughts, but they make use of the well-known 'letter-stick', and those I have received have been handed over with a certain breathlessness, as if they were charmed missives. Their use is intended to lend an importance to a message, which however cannot be deciphered by the recipient. All he sees on the flat oblong chip of wood is a series of carved lines, circles, and crosses, probably partly covered by a coat of red ochre. After an appropriate examination of the stick the bearer is invariably called on to decode the message. He obligingly takes it, and pointing to one mark says that it represents the writer, that another is for his brother, that several strokes refer to a number of days or lunar months, and that a wide cut is a request for a canoe or an indication of the strength of a raiding party. Marks on letter-sticks merely remind the bearer of points in the message he is conveying. The last line on all letter-sticks sent to me invariably ended with the request: 'Please send me some tobacco.'

[648] Before leaving Darwin on the first trip to east Arnhem Land, I visited three brothers who were serving sentences for having murdered Japanese fishermen in Caledon Bay. They were glum and disinterested till I told them where I was going, and they then asked me to take a letter-stick to their father. Weeks later I delivered this message on an isolated beach near Caledon Bay, and that night the camp sang and wailed over memories revived by the letter-stick.

202 372 Probably the most popular of all delusions concerning the nomad is that he sends messages by means of smoke. I am not aware that any aboriginal has ever sent any coded signal by smoke; yet, on the other hand, they will interpret smoke-fire as indicating the presence of visitors and will light fires for an easily understood purpose, or in accordance with a pre-arranged plan. Fires that break out unexpectedly and perhaps are due to smouldering logs bursting [775]